



Satpuda Vikas Mandal, Pal

Tahasil ३ Raver, Dist ३ Jalgaon (Maharashtra)

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Satpuda Vikas Mandal (SVM) is a non-government organisation located in the Yawal forest of Satpuda Ranges at Jalgaon District, Maharashtra in India. The organization aims to support local and tribal communities through education, social awareness, and agricultural science. Founded in 1953, Satpuda Vikas Mandal has worked tirelessly over the past 60 years to bring education and technology into the region while maintaining customs and culture in the local communities it supports. SVM runs 6 village boarding schools (incorporating primary and secondary levels), as well as a Senior College, and Tertiary College courses.

Over the past 3 years Swinburne University 'IT for Social Impact' program, led by Dr Jason Sargent, has brought groups of students to SVM to assist in improving the IT capacity and resources of the organization and the educational institutions it operates.

IT has only recently been introduced into the remote areas in which SVM operates.

Most of the schools had only a few old-model working computers – possibly with several lying idle because no-one was available to attend to their faults. High Schools have a compulsory IT subject – but due to the absence of working computers students most often have no hands on experience. This difficulty is particularly acute in relation to internet. Several of the SVM schools are so remote that there is no internet connection at all – and yet internet experience is an essential component of their course of study. There is also a problem in these schools in that many Teachers have had little experience with computers – so they lack confidence in teaching IT subjects in the curriculum.

While there is impressive IT expertise in cities and towns of India – it is only beginning to reach the areas where SVM works. This is a major issue for the young people of the area – who often need to seek work away from their native villages – but lack IT skills which are important for an ever increasing array of jobs. Over the past 3 years the Swinburne 'IT for Social Impact' students, under the leadership of Dr Jason Sargent, have enabled significant improvements to the accessibility, reliability, and quality of IT access for

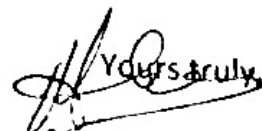
students in the remote areas of India. In the first year of involvement Swinburne IT students completed an audit of all computers operating within SVM projects. This was a valuable basic platform for building future involvement. Many computers were repaired – and local teachers and administration staff taught how to identify problems and correct them. A social audit was also conducted to determine what access student had to computers in their homes. Hands on sessions were then conducted with students and teachers – giving many students their first experience in working on a computer. The Swinburne IT students also introduced some new technologies eg weather monitoring equipment which relayed climatic information to a computer, a library box (which could provide an internet-type experience in areas where there was no internet connection), and a keno (a simple self assembled computer which demonstrated basic components and operations of computers).

In subsequent years the Swinburne IT group has continued with the technology audit, maintenance, and repair of computers within SVM. It has continued the social audit – providing interesting longitudinal information on accessibility of IT to students in schools.

It has continued hands-on sessions with students. It has reviewed the usefulness of new technologies introduced the previous year (eg weather stations, library box, keno) and introduced new options for trial (eg BRK, drones, computer use in photography).

In addition the Swinburne IT group has engaged in a number of new IT projects. In one of SVM schools it has installed connections for all computers to internet. In the same school it began the process of opening email accounts for students – and taught staff how to continue this process with remaining students. It created websites for SVM and its agricultural component (called Krishi Vigyan Kendra – or KVK). It constructed a wikipedia entry for SVM. It worked on several agricultural projects with KVK which required advanced IT knowledge.

Overall the Swinburne IT group, under the leadership of Jason Sargent, has significantly improved accessibility to IT for whole communities in some of the poorest and most remote areas of Maharashtra, India. This access will be vital for these communities connecting with mainstream India – accessing many resources previously unavailable. The access will give young people in these remote communities an introduction to skills increasingly needed for jobs in the outside world. It gives teachers additional resources for more effective learning. It tests the appropriateness of IT applications for tackling some of the special needs of agricultural and remote communities.


Yours truly,
Secretary SVM, Pal